

10

SIMPLE THINGS  
YOU CAN DO  
TO HELP CLEAN  
RHODE ISLAND  
WATERS

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# 10 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO IMPROVE WATER QUALITY IN RHODE ISLAND



There are many streams and rivers that flow through our backyards and drain into ponds, lakes, bays and ultimately the ocean. Pollutants such as animal feces, fertilizer, oil, hazardous waste, road sand, and grease on the land can be washed into our waters, but we can reduce this type of pollution. Here is a list of 10 things you can do to help clean our local waterways.



**1. Learn about** your local waters. Everyone lives in a **watershed**, which is the drainage area to a local waterbody (think of washing everything in a sink down the drain and the drain is your local river or stream). Figure out what waters are closest to you and where they flow. Learn about local animal life and plants that live in and around these waters. Check out DEM's website to find out more about your watershed at [www.state.ri.us/dem/topics/water.htm](http://www.state.ri.us/dem/topics/water.htm)



**2. Don't feed ducks!**

Although you may enjoy feeding geese, ducks, gulls and other waterfowl, remember that they too contribute to the same type of pollution that limits swimming and shellfishing. One bird dropping can contaminate 10,000 gallons of water. Bread and other human food are bad

for bird's digestive tracts too. Feeding waterfowl can also attract larger bird populations and may cause some birds to stop migrating.



**3. Pick up** after your pets. Dog waste and feces from other warm-blooded animals pollute local waterways and are larger polluters than you may think. This type of pollution contributes to the closing of beaches and shellfish beds all over the state. Pick up your pet's waste and deposit it in a trash can.



**4. Inspect septic** systems.

Approximately 1/3 of the state uses some form of septic system for sewage disposal. Failing septic systems or cesspools are a major source of pollution to ground water and local reservoirs. What you flush directly affects the water we drink and the waters where we fish, swim and boat. If you have a septic system inspect it regularly, pump and repair it as needed. If you have a cesspool, replace it. For more information on maintaining a healthy septic system the **Septic System Checkup Handbook** is available online at [www.state.ri.us/dem/pubs/regs/regs/water/isdsbook.pdf](http://www.state.ri.us/dem/pubs/regs/regs/water/isdsbook.pdf) or call for a copy at 222-6822.



**5. Avoid over-fertilizing**

your lawn. During rain storms, **nutrients** from lawn fertilizer can be washed off lawns and paved areas into local waters. This type of pollution contributes to **eutrophication**, a

process that causes nuisance algal blooms and reduction of habitat and oxygen levels for many aquatic organisms. This leads to a decline in fish and shellfish populations, and reduces the diversity of fish in our waters. Get your soil tested to see if it really needs more fertilizer and if so, use as little as necessary. Read the label on fertilizer packages, apply according to directions, and clean-up any fertilizer left on paved areas. Also, reduce your lawn area by planting native, more drought-tolerant plants that are better adapted for the environment, and can act as buffers to prevent runoff from your lawn. For more information and fact sheets, log onto the **University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension Home\*A\*Syst** website at [www.uri.edu/ce/wq](http://www.uri.edu/ce/wq).



**6. Minimize** the use of hazardous products and **recycle** as much as possible. Cleaning and other household products contain many hazardous chemicals. Try to use the least harmful products available. Learn how to dispose of household hazardous chemicals properly by calling the **RI Resource Recovery** program at 942-1430 x 241 or visit them online at [www.rirrc.org](http://www.rirrc.org). The RIRRC website also has recycling information. Recycling helps to conserve natural resources and reduces the amount of refuse sent to landfills. Start a compost bin and buy products made with or packaged in recycled material to reduce waste further. Consult your town for **recycling** guidelines and check the RIRRC website listed above.



## 7. Get involved. Volunteer.

Help with clean-up efforts or be a volunteer water monitor. Participate in local activities that benefit the environment. Find out if there is a watershed council near you. A list is available on DEM's website at [www.state.ri.us/dem/topics/water.htm](http://www.state.ri.us/dem/topics/water.htm). If your watershed does not have an association, start one! Other statewide non-profit organizations also need volunteers. For more information check out the websites for Save the Bay at [www.savebay.org](http://www.savebay.org) and URI's Watershed Watch at [www.uri.edu/ce/wq/](http://www.uri.edu/ce/wq/). Every little bit you do counts! **Speak out.** Attend public meetings that pertain to water quality. Your participation makes the statement that your community is concerned about local waterways. Public involvement is imperative if your local and state public servants are to help you make large-scale improvements in your watershed. If you see a problem in your area or want something done, say something! If you don't have time to attend meetings, call or contact a city or town official, a state representative, or DEM.



## 8. Conserve water.

If you are connected to a public sewer, conserving water will help reduce the discharge from your wastewater treatment facility into local waters. Water conservation helps prevent septic system failures. To learn more about conserving water, visit the RI Water Resources Board at [www.wrb.state.ri.us](http://www.wrb.state.ri.us).



## 9. Pump it, don't dump it!

If you own a sailboat or a motorboat have your holding tank emptied at one of the local pumpout stations around Rhode Island. For a list of **pumpout locations** call 222-3961 or visit [www.state.ri.us/dem/maps/static/pumpmap.jpg](http://www.state.ri.us/dem/maps/static/pumpmap.jpg). Also, if you have an old engine on your motor boat, look into updating it to a new 2-cycle or 4-cycle engine. They are cleaner for the environment and more efficient, which means they are lighter on your wallet!



## 10. Get out!

Get out on the water. Swim, sail, surf, kayak, fish, windsurf, boat, shellfish, go birding or walk along the shore. Explore the waters near your home or visit other parts of the state. For information about beach closures, contact the Department of Health **Beach Hotline** at 222-2751 or online at [www.health.state.ri.us/topics/bathing.htm](http://www.health.state.ri.us/topics/bathing.htm). For information on **shellfish bed closures**, call DEM at 222-3961. Make it a point to enjoy the benefits of living near the water, and while you're out there keep an eye out for problems or pollution sources. To **file an environmental complaint with DEM** (which can be anonymous), call: 222-1360.

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